

**THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO**  
**FIRE SAFETY & BRUSH MANAGEMENT GUIDE**  
**For Private Property**

(Revised 12/5/03)

## Introduction

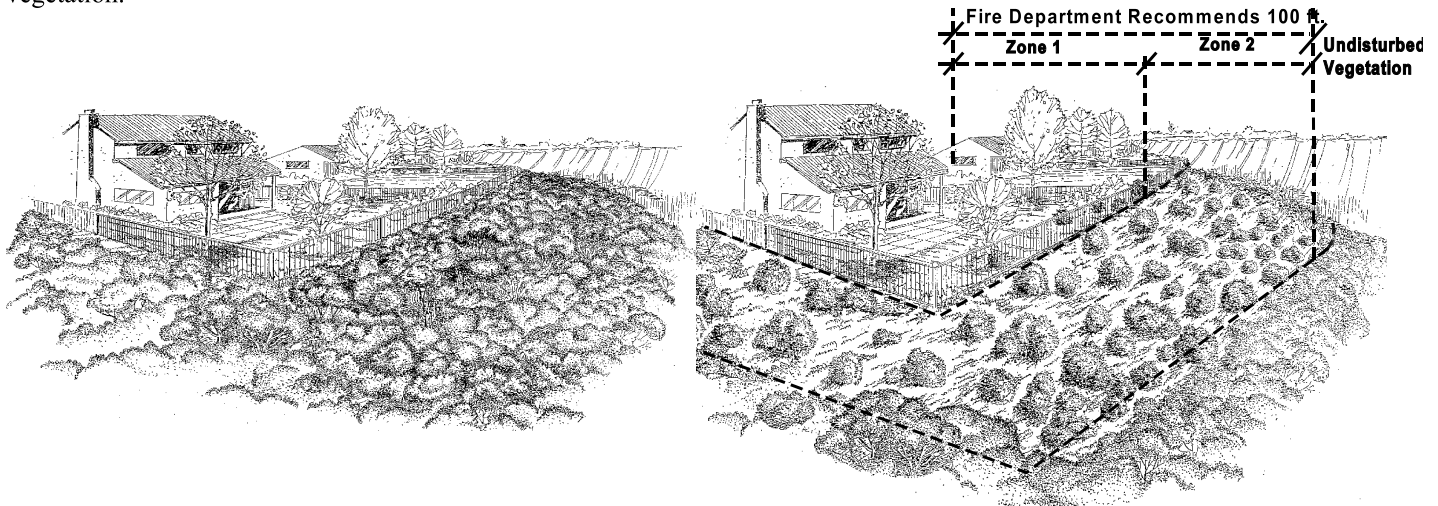
Proper maintenance of plants and other flammable materials around your home and business can reduce future wildfire impacts on your property. Doing it properly can also avoid creating other hazards such as soil erosion and potential slope failures. This bulletin provides simplified information for you to protect your property and do brush management consistent with the City of San Diego's California Fire Code and other important regulations. In addition, no permits from the City are required if you perform brush management on your property consistent with these guidelines.

## Structure Features and Plant Maintenance

Two key ways to create a fire resistant property are to make your structure more fire resistant and to reduce the connection of flammable plant material to existing structures. Before you begin, you should verify where your property boundaries are to insure that the improvements you make are on your property. If you cannot accomplish the brush management recommendations below completely on your property and the adjacent property is City-owned open space or park land, please contact the Park and Recreation Department Brush Management Section at (619) 525-8607.

**Structure Features** - Many changes can be made to the buildings, fences, and other structures around your home or business to reduce impacts from wildfires. Recommendations include installing fire retardant roofing; making walls, roof eaves and other overhangs one-hour fire-resistive; covering roof eave vents with 1/4 inch non-combustible wire mesh screen; and by eliminating wood fences, wood decks, and other flammable structures that are connected to or in close proximity to your home or business. Please consult with a qualified architect or contractor for specific recommendations that would benefit your property. In addition, proper site maintenance including cleaning roofs and gutters, covering chimney outlets with nonflammable 1/2 inch wire screen, and making sure storage of flammable items is at least 30 feet from structures and other flammable items will add to a safe property.

**Plant Maintenance** - Reducing the volume of plant material on your property can further reduce the risks from wildfire. To do it properly, you need to follow some basic concepts and rules. As illustrated in Figure 1 below, a property that is not maintained provides a quick path for fire to follow to reach a structure. Figure 2 below illustrates the same property after proper brush management. It illustrates two important areas (Zone 1 and Zone 2) that need to be maintained differently. The Fire Department recommends a combined Zone 1 and Zone 2 dimension of 100 feet, measured from your home or business to the edge of undisturbed vegetation.



**Figure 1: Before Brush Management**

**Figure 2: After Pruning and Thinning**

**Zone 1** - This area is the level area (no steeper than 1 foot of elevation change for each 4 feet of horizontal distance) around your home or business. Plants in this zone should consist of irrigated, ornamental species. This vegetation should be kept in a well-watered condition and cleared of dead material. In this zone, no more than 10 percent of the native, non-irrigated vegetation should be retained. Trees should be pruned away from structures and chimneys in this zone. Wood decks, fences, and other flammable structures and materials should be removed. No irrigation from this area should flow into Zone 2 to avoid encouraging plant growth in Zone 2. Year-round maintenance should be done in this area.

**Zone 2** - This area is the first defense for fire safety. In this zone, you should selectively thin and prune native or naturalized vegetation to preserve the natural appearance of the area while reducing the amount of burnable vegetation. In this zone, 50 percent

of the native, non-irrigated vegetation should be cut to a height of 6 inches (thinned) following a mosaic pattern as shown in Figure 2 above. No excavation, removal, or disturbance of existing plant root systems should occur to prevent future erosion. The remaining plant material should be pruned as described below and shown in Figure 3 to remove 50 percent of the flammable fuel. All debris and trimmings should be removed from the site or converted to mulch by a chipping machine and evenly spread out to a maximum 6 inch depth. No irrigation should be placed or used in this area to reduce plant growth, and thus reduce the amount of burnable vegetation. Regular inspection and periodic maintenance should be done in this zone.

**Brush Pruning (Zone 2)** - When doing thinning and pruning, please use the following guidelines:

1. Remove dead or dying material, trim back lower large branches, and thin crowded plants **Figure 3 - Pruning Example** so that 50 percent of material in the retained plants is removed as shown in Figure 3.
2. The plants which are not to be saved should be cut off at six inches above the ground.
3. The lowest branches of trees and large shrubs should be three times higher than the height of the vegetation below the plant, or six feet, whichever is higher.
4. Minimize walking and maintenance activities on steep slopes since this promotes erosion and causes soil to become compacted and increases the amount of runoff.



Unpruned Shrub



Shrub with 50 Percent Pruning

**Fire Safety Checklist** - The things you need to do. . .

#### Roof

- ☐ Remove dead or overhanging branches.
- ☐ Remove any branches within 10 feet of chimney vent.
- ☐ Clean all dead leaves and needles from roof and gutters.
- ☐ Install a roof that meets the fire resistance classification of Class A or better.
- ☐ Cover chimney outlet with a nonflammable screen of 1/2 inch or smaller mesh.

#### Landscape

- ☐ On steep slopes trim flammable vegetation a safe distance from structures.
- ☐ The canopies of large trees should not form a continuous planting mass.
- ☐ Choose ornamental landscaping plants for Zone 1 that are fire resistant and non-invasive.
- ☐ Maintain all plants by regularly removing dead branches, leaves and needles.

#### Yard

- ☐ Stack woodpiles at least 30 feet from all structures, fences, and other combustible material.
- ☐ Remove all stacks of construction materials, pine needles, leaves, and other debris.
- ☐ Keep lawn chairs, umbrellas, and other canvas furniture (that might be easily ignited from sparks) a safe distance from structures.
- ☐ Clear all vegetation and other combustible or flammable materials from beneath deck area.
- ☐ Enclose underside of elevated decks with fire resistant materials.
- ☐ Refrain from dumping lawn and brush clippings in canyons.
- ☐ Structures (such as fences) in Zone 1 must be made of noncombustible or one-hour, fire-rated materials.

#### Access

- ☐ Identify at least two exit routes from your neighborhood.
- ☐ Make sure that street names and house numbers are clearly visible.

#### Fire Escape Plan

- ☐ Designate an emergency meeting place outside your neighborhood.
- ☐ Immediately evacuate the area when ordered by police or fire personnel.

#### For Additional Information

1. For brush and weed abatement questions, contact the San Diego Fire Rescue Department (619) 533-4444.
2. To determine permit or other easement restrictions on your property, check your deed and title through the County Recorder's Office at (619) 237-0502.
3. For a permit to do brush management on private property with a permit or easement restriction contact the Development Services Department at (619) 446-5000.
4. To obtain a permit to perform brush management on City-owned open space or park land, contact the City Park & Recreation Department, Brush Management Section, at (619) 525-8607.
5. For more information, visit our website at [www.sandiego.gov](http://www.sandiego.gov).